The oasis is surrounded by the sands; yesterday a frightening storm raised them. The horizon seemed to rise up toward us like a blanket you pull up in bed. You could see nothing and could hardly breathe.

Not far from the town is a poor cemetery that the sand is slowly invading; one can barely make out a few tombs. In the desert the idea ot death pursues us, and, strange to say, it is not sad. At Biskra, behind the old fort, in the very center of the oasis, the rains have furrowed the old cemeteiy and, since the dead are buried directly in the earth, the detached bones are in spots as plentiful as stones.

The sandstorm lasted until evening; at sunset we went up to the minaret. The sky was the color of ashes, the palm trees were dull; the town, slate-colored. A great wind blew from the east like a blast of divine malediction such as the prophets announced. And, in that scene of desolation, we saw a caravan start out.

The Oulad dance better here than in Biskra and are more beautiful; indeed, this is the only place I have seen them dance well. We returned here, never tired of that grave and languid dance, almost entirely done with the arms and wrists, very decorous; dazed, almost exhausted by that insistent, rapid, diminishing, intoxicating music which stirs you to ecstasy and will not stop when you leave it—which still obsesses rne, certain evenings, just as the desert does.

I should have enjoyed spending the night on the square where the caravans were camping. Brush fires were burning; around them Arabs were talking in low voices; others were singing; they sang all night long.

Athman tells me the story of Uriah's wife.

According to the Arab tradition, it was while pursuing a golden dove from hall to hall in his palace that David, whom he calls Daoud, finally

reached that upper terrace from which he could see Bath-sheba,

Athman relates: *, . . the Jew told him that Moses was right and that God would receive first the Jews, then the Arabs, and perhaps even the Christians* The Christian told him that Christ was right and that God would take unto himself the Christians, but also the Arabs and even the Jews. The Arab told him that Mohammed was right and that God would admit the Arabs into his paradise, but that he would close the door on the unconverted Jews and Christians, And when he had heard all three, he hastened to become a Mussulman/* • The Christians have seniority over the Mussulmans, who say (and enjoy telling me) that if a Christian pronounces before death the credo of Islam: "God is God and Mohammed is his prophet/' he enters paradise before an Arab.